

National Intelligence Officers

1 Nov 78

NOTE FOR: Robert R. Bowie, D/NFAC

In your concern with the shape of NIEs,  
you might be interested in the attached.

25X1 [redacted] is a thoughtful officer with  
a great deal of experience in these matters.  
You might want to distribute it to the NIOs  
and make it the topic of one of the Tuesday  
meetings with them. I realize that the need  
to present alternate hypotheses in our pro-  
duction is a much broader one than just  
warning and this indeed makes it a topic that  
requires discussion.

Richard Lehman  
NIO/Warning

Attachment

Distribution:

- 1 - D/NFAC
- ① - I&W (Gen.) File
- 1 - NIO/W Chrono

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## Strategic Warning Staff

Washington, D.C. 20301

S-0060/SWS

19 October 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Richard Lehman, NIO for Warning

SUBJECT : Estimative versus Warning Intelligence

1. The draft Interagency Memorandum on Sino-Soviet Competition in Indochina (12 October 1978) contains much useful background information, but SWS feels it is deficient from the standpoint of warning. This raises a question that seems likely to appear rather frequently as we move into the new national organization for I and W, namely, should coordinated estimates or memoranda on subjects which involve significant warning problems represent the sole community judgments, or should they, in some cases, be accompanied or supplemented by more narrowly focused warning assessments?

2. This question arises from the substantial differences between estimative judgments and warning assessments. The former would normally present consensus views on the most probable course of developments, while the latter in many cases must address less probable but possible developments which might affect US interests and require high-level policy decisions. There will undoubtedly be occasions when analysts concerned primarily with warning feel that estimates or memoranda on major foreign trends or developments give inadequate treatment to the warning dimensions of the problem, but it will be awkward (perhaps unwelcome) to press for modifications of agreed estimative judgments to accommodate warning interests.

3. Our traditional and conventional estimative techniques and style will sometimes make it difficult to address, in the same paper, warning dimensions with the kind of analysis and detail the warning mission requires. But the issuance of separate warning assessments which necessarily would modify, if not challenge, certain agreed estimative judgments might present even greater difficulties.

4. There would seem to be three possible options for dealing with the divergent requirements of estimative and warning assessments.

A. Attempt to reconcile these requirements or minimize the differences by modifying the conventional estimative style and approach in a way that would give more attention to the "possible," i.e., greater flexibility and latitude in qualifying and hedging "probable" judgments by noting significant "possible" developments that cannot be safely discounted. Perhaps estimative papers could reduce the amount of background and historical material -- much of which is almost "basic intelligence" -- in order to provide more detailed predictive analysis and weighing of alternative lines of development.

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B. Retain the conventional estimative style which concentrates on the most "probable" and "likely" in the body of estimates and memoranda, but attach as an annex warning assessments which elaborate possible or alternative developments at greater length.

C. Publish warning assessments under separate cover and disseminate these along with estimates or memoranda.

5. Current intelligence obviously presents a different and even more knotty problem. There would seem to be no solution but to use a vehicle such as an Alert Memorandum to balance and supplement current intelligence judgments.

[Redacted Signature]

Director

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## Comments on Draft Interagency Memorandum on Sino-Soviet Competition in Indochina

Vietnam's Intentions

SWS agrees that Hanoi "is embarked on a long-term effort to bring a more malleable regime to power in Phnom Penh" (para. 61). We believe, however, that the draft underestimates the likelihood of a major Vietnamese offensive in the next two months by describing this as an option that cannot be "completely ruled out." (para. 64). We believe that Vietnamese deployments and preparations which have been identified so far point to a military operation that will surpass the offensive of last December-January in both scope and objectives. Hanoi's officials are speaking privately with striking confidence about Vietnam's ability to destroy the Pol Pot regime "in weeks or a few months." They dismiss the possibility that China will be able to prevent the regime's eventual collapse.

The draft suggests that if the Pol Pot regime falls, it might be replaced by a "nationalist regime" that "would not necessarily be a Vietnamese puppet" and which might command enough Chinese support to "preserve Cambodian independence." The memorandum does not explain where such a "nationalist" regime might come from or who would organize and lead it. We would contend that, under present and foreseeable circumstances, an independent "nationalist" government is a political impossibility and that any successor to the Pol Pot regime must be essentially a creature of either Hanoi or Peking. There is no longer a Sihanoukist "middle course" or "neutral solution" available in Cambodia.

In undertaking a major offensive operation, Hanoi of course would calculate the risks of a Chinese military reaction, possibly a show of force along the Sino-Vietnamese border, as suggested in para. 70. We believe this assessment should consider the possibility that the Vietnamese will underestimate these risks because of over-confidence arising from their conviction that they successfully faced down Peking in the confrontation last summer over the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. The Vietnamese, moreover, appear to be in a defiant and vindictive frame of mind which might cause them to dismiss Chinese warnings or border shows of force as bluffs. (Para. 23 judges that "Peking is probably reluctant to apply direct military pressure on Vietnam either by sending Chinese combat troops to Cambodia or by making a major show of force along the Sino-Vietnamese border.")

China's Intentions

As we read it, the draft memorandum leaves the impression that China will be either unable or unwilling to take strong political or military actions to deter a major Vietnamese offensive in Cambodia or, if deterrence fails, to react with the kind of military support for the Pol Pot regime that would oblige Hanoi to halt its offensive and withdraw its forces from Cambodia. The

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memorandum cogently argues that if the Phnom Penh regime's survival is threatened, "China would have no really satisfactory course of action." It rules out the dispatch of Chinese troops to Cambodia "under any circumstances" and discusses three possible courses of action. The draft, however, does not venture a judgment on which course Peking is most likely to adopt.

This treatment, in our view, has the effect of underplaying the intangible factors of psychological and political incentives which might generate a more aggressive and high risk Chinese reaction. We believe the assessment should take into consideration the extent to which China's past political and military support of the Pol Pot regime has already engaged Peking's prestige and credibility and deepened its commitment to the defense and survival of this regime.

Another question that should be weighed is the extent to which Peking's actions on behalf of the Cambodian regime have already, willy nilly, seriously narrowed its options, ruling out the third course of doing nothing more and "letting the chips fall where they might."

A third question concerns the extent to which China's failure to induce concessions from Hanoi during the contest over the ethnic Chinese will condition Peking's calculations and actions in a showdown over Cambodia. This vital question of the costs to Peking's prestige and credibility arising from Hanoi's successful resistance to Chinese pressure during the past six months raises a real possibility of Chinese miscalculation, overreaction, and an impulse to engage in risky gambles. Peking underestimated Hanoi's capacity to defy pressure last summer, and the much higher stakes involved in Cambodia might well draw the Chinese into an even more costly miscalculation.

In weighing the options open to Peking, we would suggest that more detailed consideration be given to measures that would fall between the dispatch of ground forces to Cambodia, at one extreme, and doing nothing, on the other. The Chinese, for example, might send fighter aircraft manned by "volunteer" pilots in the belief that a modest injection of air power would be very effective against Vietnamese infantry and armored forces. Alternatively, China might send crews to man anti-aircraft artillery, or tanks and crews to oppose Vietnamese ground thrusts at key points between the border and Phnom Penh.

In weighing China's motives and intentions, SWS suggests that consideration be given to the possible effects of infighting in the leadership on Peking's courses of action. Decisions on how to deal with what Peking perceives to be a serious challenge to its rights and interests in Indochina almost certainly will aggravate existing differences. These decisions, moreover, will be made at a time when there are signs that the struggle for power and advantage in the Politburo has intensified. Reports last week that Peking party boss Wu Te has been removed from his municipal posts are the most visible manifestation of differences and competition in the top leadership.

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It seems quite possible that policy toward Vietnam and Cambodia has, or will, become entangled in this infighting. If, as seems apparent, the removal of Wu Te signals a setback for Chairman Hua Kuo-feng and a gain for Teng Hsiao-ping, the latter's role as the leading spokesman for an assertive, hard-line stance in dealing with Hanoi may assume even greater significance in the weeks ahead. The logic of Teng's role at least implies that he has seized upon Hanoi's defiant challenge as a useful weapon for enhancing his power position at the expense of his leading rivals. If political considerations of this nature have in fact influenced Teng's hard-line stance, this role and the vagaries of competition over power and policy may propel him into advocating more ambitious and risky involvement in Cambodia than might be the case if leadership politics were more stable and placid.

Teng's reported assertion that a large-scale Vietnamese military move against Cambodia would mean war between Vietnam and China means, at the very least, that he is pressing the case for a vigorous game of threat and political warfare against Hanoi. This threatening stance has been echoed in private remarks by Chinese officials abroad to the effect that Peking will never allow Vietnam to dominate the Phnom Penh government and that China will go all out to defend Cambodia even if this requires the supply of "tanks, warplanes, and manpower." These spokesmen are warning that if the Pol Pot regime is seriously threatened, China will commit combat personnel to defend Cambodia."

In view of the formidable logistical problems involved, it is easy to dismiss these warnings as rhetorical bluster designed to intimidate and deter Hanoi. However, Teng Hsiao-ping's willingness to promote such a threatening image of China's resolution represents a political fact of considerable consequence which deserves to be weighed carefully. This image of Chinese interests and determination tends not only to elevate and transform the Sino-Vietnamese competition for influence in Indochina into a major test of strength and prestige but to reduce Peking's freedom for maneuver and retreat. Historically, these are among the major ingredients of miscalculation, overreaction, and ill-considered gambles. In sum, SWS believes Hanoi's threat to the Pol Pot regime confronts the Chinese with a real prospect of getting in over their heads and eroding their control over an escalating confrontation.

#### Soviet Intentions

SWS believes the draft memorandum underestimates Moscow's incentive to encourage and support Vietnam's ambitions in Cambodia. In particular, we are not persuaded that "Moscow almost certainly would advise against an all-out invasion of Cambodia" and would prefer that Hanoi avoid an "overt use of force." (para. 45) We do not find the reasons adduced for this judgment very compelling, nor do we believe that Sino-Vietnamese "tension" would necessarily "trigger a Sino-Soviet crisis," whatever this phrase is intended to mean.

As we read Soviet interests and incentives in the Sino-Vietnamese contest, Moscow would be delighted if the Vietnamese succeed in unseating a Chinese

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client and destroying China's sphere of influence in Cambodia. The Soviets, moreover, would welcome the opportunity to exploit the political and propaganda repercussions of any overt Chinese military pressure on Hanoi.

The only reservation we would have centers on timing. If a critical showdown between China and Vietnam should coincide with final negotiations on a SALT II agreement or with a Senate ratification debate, Moscow's priority interest in Soviet-US relations would inhibit exploitation of the Cambodian conflict and might cause the Soviets to urge temporary restraint on Hanoi.

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Director, SWS

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